

# COMMODUS.

AN HISTORICAL PLAY.

BY  
LEWIS WALLACE.



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DEAR SIR:

You gave me permission to inscribe this work to you; and I do so now with grateful acknowledgment of the profit derived from your repeated criticisms, which were always most tender when you were most inexorable.

Sincerely, your friend,

LEW WALLACE.

CRAWFORDSVILLE, IND., MARCH, 2, 1877.

## PERSONS REPRESENTED.

COMMODUS,

MATERNUS,

CLEANDER, Imperial Favorite.

ANTONINUS,

POMPEIANUS,

BURRHUS,

BURBO, Chief of Gladiators.

MARCUS, Lieutenant to Maternus.

CAPTAINS, <sup>1</sup>  
<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>3</sup>  
<sup>4</sup> to Maternus.

COURTIERS, <sup>1</sup>  
<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>3</sup> to Commodus.

CLERK, to Cleander.

LANDLORD,

MASTER OF FEAST, a Noble Roman.

GERMAN ENVOY,

EGYPTIAN REPRESENTATIVE,

AFRICAN ENVOY,

BRITISH HOSTAGE,

BOY, Son of Maternus.

WIFE OF MATERNUS,

FADILLA, Sister of Commodus, debauched by him.

MARCIA, Commodus' favorite mistress.

QUEEN OF BACCHANALS.

Officers, Messengers, Cupids, Gladiators, Charioteers, Bacchanals, Children of Maternus, Soldiers, Amazons, Syrens, and Hebe.

### IN THE MASQUE OF OLYMPUS.

Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Mars, Mercury, Vulcan, Neptune, Diana, Apollo, Pluto, Venus, Cupid, Silenus, Bacchus, Hercules, and Ganymede.

## COMMODUS.

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### ACT I.

SCENE I. ROME. *Road in front of a cave. Wife of MATERNUS seated upon a stone, breaking flax. Off shortway, playing, her younger children, boy and girl. Older boy talking with her.*

*Boy.* I saw my father pass but now alone;  
And with his hands he made as he would kill  
The very air. O, mother, what has hapt  
To stir him so?

*Wife.* How like you are to him!  
O if the years but serve to make you such  
A man in quality, as brave and true,  
So arm'd with goodly nature, to the weak  
So tender, I would speed them gone and come,  
Nor anything as joyful. Sit you here,  
And list you loving, I'll his story tell.

*Boy. (At her feet.)* I'm ready, mother,—see,

*Wife.* A pretty boy!  
A wondrous pretty boy! And yet when ta'en  
To Rome he was a child as blue of eye  
And fair of face as you; and e'en more full  
Of happy life. And there in fighting arts  
They train'd him perfect in his patient youth.  
And tricks of sword and shield he did invent,  
And play for lordship of the helmed herds  
Then tradewise slain to sweet the hungry mobs  
Of bloody mistress Rome. The very morn  
His lagging manhood came, he stood the world's  
Admitted first in arms; and never slave  
As rain'd with gold and glut with honors rich.  
Nor went his fortune e'er amiss till once—

*Boy.* Till once, you say? O, mother, I am hot  
To hear of that.

*Wife.* Your patience, pretty one!  
I cannot speak of it but I must wash  
My words with tears. There, there—'tis over now,  
And I'll go on. That day a stripling tall,  
But in the merest green of lusty youth,  
Confronted him. They fought; and pitiful,  
Your father did but smite him with his shield—  
And only once—and—

*Boy.* What! He was not beat?  
*Wife.* Nor then nor since, my boy! Upon the sand,  
As flung from cloudy height, the lad lay stretch'd.  
Then from the climbing seats the eager herd,  
With roars of laughter, shook the theatre,  
And turn'd their thumbs up crying, *Kill the wretch!*

*Boy.* O, O!  
*Wife.* Nay, spare you, child. E'en while the  
sword  
Had aim to strike, your father heard a name  
To ear unus'd, and melted at the sound;  
And looking, lo! 'twas Burbo at his feet—  
His brother Burbo—

*Boy.* Brother, did you say?  
*Wife.* The eyes with which he look'd were eyes of love,  
As sharp to see and cheatless as a god's.  
His youngest brother 'twas.

*Boy.* And then what hap?  
*Wife.* O then as erst a baby in the trough  
A-swing the roof-tree 'neath, he rais'd him up,  
And bore him out, and, outlaw'd by the act,  
Fled hither to these rocks and friendly woods;  
From whence he turn'd his practis'd arms 'gainst Rome,  
And such as willing bore her hated yoke.  
Fame follow'd fast, and Fortune, bringing strength  
To rave the roads, and fields, and wall-girt towns,  
And swoop, the legions oft as haply found.

*Boy.* My father is a hero.  
*Wife.* That he is,  
And never more than now; for now while here  
We talking sit, to crush him in his hold,

A Roman speeding comes with armies four,  
Our best outnumber'd by the least of them—  
I hear a step—Be still!—

*Enter MATERNUS. (1) He takes the girl, and walks with her.*

*Mat.* My little, little puss! My kitten all  
The day at play. Come play with me—But hark!  
[*Singing heard in the distance.*

*Wife.* Hear I aright? They seem to come this way.  
[*Singers approach.*

SONG.

*The world goes up, the world comes down ;  
Hit or miss, win or lose ;  
Blow good or ill ; sail ship or sink,  
Great Rome will have her dues.*

*Of land or river, sun or air,  
Or of the sea's white foams,  
Or mould of earth, or brawn of men,  
Naught is that is not Rome's.*

*Up with sail,  
Farewell home ;  
With us dance, with us sing,  
On to Rome !  
On to Rome !*

[*The singers come up, and break into a dance, clashing castanets, tamborines and cymbals.*

*Queen.* (To *Maternus.*) We are poor—give us something.

*Mat.* Who are you? And what?

*Queen.* (Singing.) *Up with sail, forward steed,  
Farewell home ;  
With us dance, with us sing,  
On to Rome !  
On to Rome !*

*Mat.* To Rome! (Thoughtfully.) Is not this from the gods to me?

[*Turns away, but comes back, and drops some silver in the tamborine.*

Farewell. Fair queen, a thousand thanks—

[*Exeunt Bacchanals, singing, On to Rome.*

*Enter SOLDIER.*

*Mat.* Tidings?

*Sold.* Niger has won, captain. Our forces fly before him to this our center.

*Mat.* Well?

*Sold.* An army closes upon us from the north; another from the south; another from the east: and from the west one.

*Mat.* What more?

*Sold.* More I have not.

*Mat.* Thanks, and get you to eat and drink; then as the captains come in, bid them to council here at midnight. Go now.

*Sold.* By your grace, captain.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE III. *Gaud. Interior of Cave.* MATERNUS,  
MARCUS and CAPTAINS in council.

1 *Capt.* I think it best to fly.

2 *Capt.* What, run away!

That will not I. There is no place for us  
To die like this; so long we've held it ours,  
I swear 'tis home.

1 *Capt.* But hear. I'd save our lives  
For curse of Rome to come.

3 *Capt.* Most idle talk;  
The job is up for us, and I will stand  
Content with one damn'd Roman soul to chum  
Me down to hell—one, may be two or three.

4 *Capt.* I pray the gods—

*Marc.* Ho, friends, we run to cross  
Of words and bootless heat. Let's rest debate,  
And take our captain's mind.

3 *Capt.* That sounds like right.

4 *Capt.* And is the right.

2 *Capt.* Let's hear Maternus speak.

*All.* Maternus! Speak, Maternus! Speak, and that  
You say we'll do.

*Mat.* Friends, comrades, brothers.—It is time to be  
More wise than brave, and that way I will speak.  
Is't true we have no choice but fight or flight?  
Where's he turn'd forty years, and yet to learn  
Defeats are oft from kindly gods to whip  
Us up to greater deeds, in earnest fair  
Of richer stores reserv'd? And so I say  
They mean to serve us now. O, brothers mine!  
Ye first who here would bide the four fold odds—  
Wherefore? Not valor's spur imperious;  
Nor voice of duty high; but speed of death,  
From care and care to rest your fretted souls,  
The oldest lure of cowardice in mask  
Of courage. O for love I cry you *Shame!*  
And will no more of it.

2 *Capt.* What's that he says?

1 *Capt.* It was the truth—But hark!

*Mat.* To such as plead  
For flight a word. More patient than the rest,  
But not less dear to me, fling out your thoughts,  
That they may instant belt the widening world,  
And back to vouch what now I say to you.  
Between the lines afar by men unnam'd,  
Because unknown, and this no longer ours,  
There is not space where unmolested we  
Can plant our hearths anew, and be at home.  
Do not the rav'ning Roman eagles feed  
On hapless men like us, and find their prey  
In ev'ry land of earth?

3 *Capt.* I had not thought  
Of that he says.

1 *Capt.* 'Tis so!

*Marc.* Hush, hear him through.

*Mat.* Ay, give me heed, good comrades, give me heed,  
With all your senses on the furthest verge  
Of listening; for I will tell you now  
What you shall do. In Rome—so runs my first—  
The Nones of April is Cybele's day; <sup>(2)</sup>  
When celebration climbs its highest hill,  
And all the people gladsome give themselves  
To masques and mimes and pomp, and wanton roar

The arched streets with splendid revelry,  
 The rich and poor, the old and young and home  
 And foreign born alike in privilege.  
 Do you attend me, brethren?

*2 Capt.*                   Never men  
 More 'tentive, Captain.  
*Mat.*                       Well, what day nam'd I?  
*2 Capt. The Nones of April.*  
*Mat.*                       Right—you listen well,  
 My brethren. I do thank you for yourselves,  
 And on with cheer. Your men are in the night's  
 First slumber fresh'ning. Call them round their fires,  
 And publish privily that they divide,  
 And singly or in twos make way to Rome.

*Captains.* To Rome! Rome, said you?  
*Mat.*                       Ay, I said to Rome.  
 But let not wonder loose the reins of heed,  
 Good captains. Singly or in twos I bade  
 Your soldiers go, first binding them to three  
 Observances. They shall not tell to man  
 Or woman what they are, or whence they come,  
 Or whither go—that mark you number one.  
 Where choice of roads is offer'd, they shall take  
 The most obscure—that stamp you number two.  
 The groups shall sep'rate keep; but meeting they  
 Shall pass without salute of hand or tongue,  
 As very strangers verging from the poles,  
 Never to meet again—and this I give  
 As number three, and last. Now tell me I  
 Am understood.

*3 Capt.*                   Go on—The rules are plain.  
*Mat.* Are they so? Then as with our men shall they  
 Abide with us, of conscience holy laws.  
 At Rome the day before the Nones  
 Of April, look for me in wait for you  
 Impatient 'neath the walls outside the old  
 Flaminian gate. I will then and there  
 In fullest measure tell my great design,  
 And give you each a part. Nor look nor ask  
 For more to night: for I have learn'd what all

There is in silence kept. The wrecks which strew  
 The haunted shores of idle thought are there  
 For idle words distraught. Enough that its  
 Nobility when done will ring the world  
 As 'twere a bell in midmost Heaven hung.  
 Repeat the place appointed.

*Marc.* Doubt you not;  
 We have it, Captain, as you gave it us.  
 At Rome you said, beneath the walls outside  
 The old Flaminian gate.

*Mat.* Right again  
 Now to the Treasurer, and he will give  
 You money for the road. Be sure you name  
 A place somewhere within the city's girt  
 To meet your men—this best when in their palms  
 The coin you count. The sun at morn before  
 Cybele's day should see them all in Rome  
 Reported. These things done, remain there then  
 The last adieux to wives and little ones.  
 O ye are rugged men, my gallant chiefs!  
 No harm in saying here the parting may  
 Forever be. Howbeit behind you leave  
 The sweet hopes sure in woman's trusting heart  
 To wait on promises of quick return—  
 Which here they must abide.

*Marc.* Here! Keep them loving gods!  
*Mat.* And us—and us, good Marcus! Keep they us  
 In equal care!—Come now, give hand and kiss  
 In solemn pledge. The kisses witnessed  
 By all the list'ning gods, I'll take as oaths.  
 Let each one come.

[*They kiss him. Low music.*  
 My Marcus, you will stay.  
 To all the rest adieu, and meeting good  
 Beneath the walls of Rome. .

*1 Capt.* I'll speak for all.  
 Captain—stay, captain. You do give us trust  
 In pledgless sort, obliging loyalty,  
 Though we were soulless brutes. Unask'd we swear  
 You holy troth. Out, swords!

[*The captains draw and lift their swords.*

Swear—swear we all,  
To keep the time and place appointed us,  
Or perish on the way.

*All.* We swear, we swear!

*I Capt.* Good speed, Maternus! Life or death, we now  
Are yours to order bound, and hopeful too.

[*Exeunt all but Maternus and Marcus.*]

*Mat.* Good Marcus.

*Marc.* Captain.

*Mat.* Put your hand in mine.

[*Maternus puts a ring on Marcus' finger.*  
Now are you my lieutenant.

*Marc.* Let me kiss  
Your cheek again.

*Mat.* The right one 'twas before;  
Take now the left.

[*He receives the kiss.*]

My Marcus, trusted heir,  
And heart's first choice, with ev'ry honor goes  
A burthen. Listen. It may chance that on  
The Nones of April I may be in hell  
Or heaven. O a pity 'twere to grimē  
The smiling earth, and melt its ribbed hills  
To running tears, if failure smite us blank  
Because of that! So you may carry on  
In void of me, give heed, and hear what I  
Would do in Rome. Say good Cybele's day  
Has come well sped; and there in robes and arms  
Prætorian, <sup>(3)</sup> as guards indifferent,  
About the palace with the millions mix'd  
And winey-mad, you—I—and all of ours  
Go helping pulse the pious riot on,  
'Till comes a time—O joyous throb of time  
For us reserv'd!—when we do turn aside,  
As call'd by Cæsar's self to do him well,  
And kill him on his throne, amidst his court,  
And dizzen'd power, if, but Fortune-bless'd,  
We find him there.

*Marc.* How! What! Upon his throne—  
Kill Cæsar!

*Mat.* O you look so daz'd,

My Marcus, I could laugh did humor serve  
The time instead of grief. I'll walk until  
Your wits come back.

*Marc.* Now, captain, have you more,  
I am myself.

*Mat.* I have, and better too,  
To edge your interest. Think—Commodus,  
The monster, dead, and safely tomb'd away,  
And heirless, who shall have his crown  
And capital? Ay, Marcus, who but he  
With strongest hand first ready? Why not I?

*Marc.* O, captain!

*Mat.* O me not! But dauntless look  
Where wistful fancy points. The street before  
The palace gate is by my thousands held.  
I call them once—but once;—as torrents freed  
By breath of summer, rave an Alpine pass,  
And thunder down the vale, they come to me—  
And Rome is mine! Shall such a chance be lost?  
Nay, give it me, my Marcus, give it me,  
And thine I swear the boundless profit next—  
To such degree I hold thee in my mind!  
There now—'tis settled—fix'd—and get thee gone  
To kiss the nestlings of thy wedded love,  
And her who brooded them, and long ere this,  
While blaz'd the night star o'er the western wall,  
Did cluck them chirping under wing.

[*Exit Maternus.*

*Marc.* So, so!  
In sooth a cloudy flight for such a bird.  
He bears himself as 't were already done.  
I have him good! For me the question is,  
Nor more nor less, shall I this Cæsar choose?  
Or that one royal born and Roman bred!—  
There is no haste. The thing he bade I will—  
I'll think of it.

[*Exit.*

SCENE IV. *Tableau. MATERNUS parting from his wife and children. Pantomime, and group in strong light.*

## ACT II.

SCENE I. *Rome. Ante-chamber in the Imperial Palace.*

POMPEIANUS, BURRHUS, and ANTONINUS<sup>(4)</sup> in waiting.

*Ant.* Gods! How the hours do stretch themselves to such

As wait at great men's doors, and hang upon  
Their moods expectant.

*Pomp.* Hush—I hear them come.

[*An interior door is opened. Flourish. Armed guards enter, and march rudely against the Senators. Boys and girls, as Cupids, follow, and shoot their arrows at the Senators, who cover their faces with their togas. Next, charioteers and gladiators. Lastly, COMMODUS, (5) in the costume of a charioteer, crimson reins over his shoulder, and a whip with silken lashes and gilded stock in hand.*

*Com.* By Jupiter! It is as I did say.  
The very snails to top of wall have climb'd,  
And cast their shells since work on it began.  
To me the lazy 'prentices!

[*He laughs heartily.*

O rich conceit! Their ears I'll take to pay  
Their master with; and if he wry his face,  
I'll make him eat them raw.

[*His following laugh with him, and clap their hands.*

Ay, have them here  
When I return. Thy shoulder—lower stoop—  
A little—up now—hold you there at that.

[*He puts his arm over a charioteer.*  
A tamer thou of horses, O, my Chroneus!  
Not Pollux self thy better—

*Char.* Cæsar makes  
A bait of me.

*Com.* My father Jove confound  
Me if I do! I had the chariot  
In mind's eye still. You saw it, said you not?

*Char.* As I see you, my Cæsar—quite as plain  
I saw it past me borne ; and my eyes blurr'd  
With looking at it. On thy stadium  
Floor they in charge did set it tenderly  
As it were precious crystal, which a breath  
Might stain incurably.

*Com.* (*Laughing.*) O beautiful !

*Char.* Ay, Cæsar, that thou art to other men  
It is to all the chariots o' the world—  
Sole incomparable.

*Com.* 'T was I who gave  
The workmen each detail. *Whom build ye for ?*  
I asked them ; and (*Laughing*) they affrighted said,  
*For Cæsar.* Then I left them marginless  
Of will their own. *The pole of gnarled oak,*  
*From end to end with Persian pearl inlaid,*  
*And arched all, like neck of crooning swan,*  
(*Laughing*) I bade them, so they star'd me pale and wild.  
*And let the axle flame with curling green*  
*Of malachite ; and for that I would pay*  
*The sun in kind, and shoot him glint for glint,*  
*With loyal cunning pact the wheels : the spokes*  
*Of silver set as furbish'd radiates*  
*In silver naves ; the fellys ivory,*  
*Of apses tinted like the cream from milk*  
*Of mares, and hoop'd in tires of temper'd bronze,*  
*To cheat an expert's eye with feint of gold.*  
*The bed a willow basket leaf'd with gold,*  
*Like that in which the haught Germanicus*  
*Did drive his happy Roman brood along*  
*The lusty triumph's way ; but—stay the thought !*  
The ancients yonder—who—ah, now I see—  
Grave Burrhus !—Antoninus, rough of speech !—  
And Pompeianus !—They came not with us ?

*A Cupid.* Good Cæsar, no—we found them here in  
wait.

*Com.* In waiting, were they ? (*Laughing*) Their intents  
do leap  
To top like painted corks in water toss'd.  
They were my father's friends, and eas'd his age  
With interchange of vapid saws and quips,

Given with eyes to ceiling upward roll'd,  
 As watching wingless motes in airy dance,  
 And haws to fetch their thoughts from darken'd depths  
 Unwilling forc'd. And then (*Laughing*) they sitting slept,  
 And nodded in their sleep, as though the speech  
 From wise to wisest ran forever on.  
 But they and I—Well, at them, little gods,  
 And ply them sharp and fast, so they will learn  
 What youth and happy childhood are—  
 Ay, shoot them sharp, and laugh, and have your will.

[*Cupids renew their sport. Pompeianus makes way to Cæsar.*]

*Pomp.* Commodus!—Prince!—Good master! Hear a word.

Your mighty father's fastest bosom friend,  
 He left me in the very summer heat  
 Of loving time, and, dying, bade me give  
 My rest of life to you; his will it was,  
 And I did swear him so.

*Com.* An old man's love!

[*Laughing.*]

To comrade me, as well a ghost escap'd  
 From deepest Dis. For songs 'twould give me sighs;  
 For laughter, groans; and it would *No* when I  
 The most would *Yes*. Hence, I say—take it hence,—  
 To dogs of Isis, or my father's tomb!  
 For I do swear you now, nor old nor young,  
 Only the gods shall say me, *Well done this,*  
*My Cæsar, or O, O!* *Alack for that!*  
 I am the empire's self.

*Pomp.* And therefore we  
 Are come to you.

*Com.* As censors! Once for all,  
 To lectures I'll an end. So!

[*He plies Pompeianus with the lash. Pompeianus covers his head. Burrhus and Antoninus come forward.*]

*Burr.* As thou art  
 That thou art—Cæsar, hold! In mercy hold  
 Thy mighty hand!

*Ant.* That I such sight should see!  
 Cæsar, a hundred sires in this man breathe,

And ring their urns with groans for what thou dost.  
His ev'ry hair a silver trumpet is  
To help the shrinking heavens cry you, *Stay*.

*Com.* As easy three as one!

[*Lashes Burrhus and Antoninus. Burrhus covers his head. Bystanders laugh.*]

*Ant.* To mountains turn'd, the times do fall  
Upon and bury us. Boy, mad or drunk,  
What is't you want? Our lives? Then these with swords,  
By swift dispatch, to mercy's grace can help  
You in the crime. Or if our honor 't is,  
Your will is surely sped; one blow did all  
A thousand could. Yet strike—and strike again,  
So you do hear. I lift these war-worn hands  
Protesting, not for self, henceforth a thing  
Incapable, except to stir of some,  
Their sneers, of others, tears, as are the men  
I chance to meet—no, Cæsar, not for self,  
But country. Send and take account of those  
Who died last night of Famine here in Rome.  
And in thy following—this buzzing swarm  
Of human curses beggar-blown from all  
The vermin nests of earth—if one there be  
To weep for stranger's woes, the vulture Plague <sup>(6)</sup>  
Invites him to the western gates to see  
How fat it feeds on suff'ring Latin folk,  
Unburied there. Cæsar, I but tongue  
The sorrows of the world, and so you give  
It pity, I will kiss the hand with which  
But now you lash'd my honor out of life.

*Com.* (*To his train*) But hear them, children. They  
are such as walk  
Through life back foremost, seeing nothing but the past.  
Observe how they distract me.

[*The gladiators lay hold of the Senators.*

*Ant.* Off! Hands off,  
I say! Strike—kill, but foul me not with touch!  
[*A gladiator draws to stab him, but Commodus catches his hand.*

*Com.* Put up the sword! Dost hear? Their lives are  
mine;

And what to do with them the prompting gods  
Do whisper me. Go bid the master roll  
My chariot into the stadium.  
Tell him to give the racing yoke-steeds white  
Their traced mates to run the course at side,  
With Arab leaders twain. So I'll revive  
The old Olympic feat; and these shall take  
My Cæsar's place beneath the purple shade,  
And crown me victor. Speed!—Now bring them on.  
Will they, then gently—there. For they must know  
With mazy splendors spun from wheels of light,  
Ablaze with envy of the sun eclips'd,  
I'll burn their eyes till blindness come with fear  
To force them pray me, *God-son, hold, enough!*

[*The train, shouting, push the Senators out. Exeunt.*

SCENE II. ROME. *A corridor in the Imperial Palace.*  
CLEANDER <sup>(7)</sup> walking.

*Clean.* I am not longer minister of state,  
But of my Cæsar's whims which, day and night  
More wantful growing, bay me open mouth'd  
For more and more—Ho, clerk!

*Enter CLERK.*

*Clerk.* Your will, my lord.

*Clean.* Give me the list.

*Clerk.* "Tis here.

[*Gives him a paper, and retires.*

*Clean.* Grow I not old  
Before I should in nature? Puffed of eyes?  
To wrinkles adding fat? Youth fading out,  
By aches of sixty filch'd? As I do see  
Myself the ox in stall is not distent  
Of stomach more than I; nor eats or drinks  
He so to deadly surfeit. In these hands  
Unsteady palsy ambush'd lies awake  
To shoot me. Death, Death! His the couriers  
Aforetime sent to bid me, *Would I that*  
*I live for, up, and at it, whip and spur—*  
And so I will—But soft!

*Enter MESSENGER.*

*Mess.*  
Cleander.

*Clean.* Get you gone.

Most gracious lord

[*Delivers a letter.*

I've pick'd the bones  
Of Labor white, and drawn their marrow clean ;  
Nor left in Trade enough of blood to stir  
A pulse to fluttering.

[*Exit Messenger.*

But yesterday

I stript the pursy lords of Syracuse ;  
The day before I broke the merchant heart  
Of old Byzantium ; last week I skimm'd  
The cream of Asia from the golden bowls  
Of Alexandria ; now I'll beggar all  
The Jews of Antioch ; and not a man  
In Spain shall have wherewith to buy an urn  
To hold his ashes. That done, Italy  
And Rome remain—Rome last. And here I have  
The names of all their rich, with what they're worth  
In Roman coin.

[*Runs over the list.*

Ships, houses, lands—Greek, Roman, African.  
Egyptian, Jew—patrician, prince and pleb—  
All rich, and therefore guilty—What to do  
With them ? To auction this one, exile that,  
And glutton Death for all. And then the end  
In bloody brief of master Commodus—  
And I'll his game of Cæsar. Happy time !  
Already in the bearded husk I hear  
The rip'ning rattle of the golden grain.  
I'll push his follies on in madder gait—  
But what is this ?

[*Reads the letter.*

From Marcia, praying me  
To call, and of Crispina tell her more.  
The queen is in my way, but game too small  
For me to trouble with. I'll to my plan,  
And play the mistress 'gainst the wanton wife,  
And wager she will win—Clerk, clerk, I say !

*Re-enter CLERK.*

*Clerk.* I'm here, my lord.

*Clean.* To mistress Marcia word,  
And say I'll come forthwith.

*Clerk.* 'Tis done, my lord.

[*Exit CLERK.*]

*Clean.* If baldness come, and rheums, and odious fat  
And age in youth about my bones enflesh  
Themselves untimely—Let them. By the gods,  
I will be Cæsar yet!

[*Exit.*]

SCENE IV. *A road through a mountain pass.* Enter  
MATERNUS. Seats himself on a stone.

*Mat.* Are these the hands to free the yoked world?  
These aching feet, coarse clad, and ploughing slow  
And wearily so many leagues of dust,  
Are they at last to climb great Cæsar's throne?  
The thought itself does father impulse strong  
As hands to push me on; and I must yield  
To it (*Rising*) For if I rest the goodly sun  
A burning eye becomes, fix'd staring lest  
Some doom of Fate by me may thwarted be,  
And I its chosen executioner.  
Rest who can—I must on.

[*Exit.*]

Enter MATERNUS' WIFE, leading a donkey, on which  
ride the younger children. The oldest boy armed with a  
javelin. She seats herself on the rock just vacated by  
Maternus. Low music.

*Boy.* I tell you, mother, we are near him now.

*Wife.* I think so, O, my boy, what will he do? You  
know he bade me stay at home.

*Boy.* He'll be glad to see us. Cheer up, cheer up,  
mother. The boy here—how he loves him! And the  
baby—ah, let her smile once, and hold her hands to him,  
the little fingers all alive with asking, and crow him, *Come!*  
and you'll see him laugh, and give us joy for joy. I'm not  
afraid.

*Wife.* Yes, that would be, my boy, if we o'ertook him  
on the homeward way; but now he's for battle bound.

O, I'm afraid! And yet I love him so! 'Tis love that drives me on. I'll follow him though he lead me round the world. (*Rising*) Come, let us go—Hark!

[*Singing heard.*

*Boy.* The dancing girls! I know them by their song.

*Wife.* O, let us hide!

*Boy.* Too late—they see us.

[*She resumes her seat.*

*Enter BACCHANALS, singing, On to Rome.*

*Queen.* Softly! Children—three—a woman and a donkey!

[*Bacchanals surround the family.*

*Queen.* (*To wife*) Tired, are you?

*Wife.* Yes.

*Queen.* And hungry?

*Wife.* No. My little ones may be.

[*The bacchanals uncover packs, and bring out bread, meat and wine, and give the children.*

*Queen.* (*Kisses the girl*) I think her pretty. Eyes so heaven-blue we never see in Cyprus. (*To wife*) Where away, if you may tell?

*Wife.* To Rome.

*Queen.* You! What have you to do in Rome? A woman, plain, without device or gift—your youth given o'er to babes—and all incapable of riot or debauch?

*Wife.* I'll find my husband there.

*Queen.* O, 'tis far to follow!

*Wife.* Far indeed; but what of that when once he's found? And since the gods' last gift—this least one, with the eyes so blue—a soldier, he in camp has constant lived.

*Queen.* O, then, there is such thing as love?

*A Bacchanal.* No, no, my queen! Believe it not. The earth is but an egg of Death, with Rome for hatching bird. True love, as you will find, has gone to salt the sea, and blue the sky.

*Queen.* Why, 'tis this woman's life—Good mother, we are bound as you. With us make the stages; and we will share with you, and give you help; and all for love of your love.

*Wife.* I must travel slow, for sake of these.

*Queen.* The little ones? Well, we will have a care of

you, and wait at times to see how get you on.

*Wife.* I have but thanks to give, and tongue to pray  
the gods for you.

*Queen.* Then you would pay us rich in unaccustomed  
coin. For the time, mother, good-bye—Come, up, my  
island-born! Up, and sing for cheer; and let's away.

[*Exeunt bacchanals, singing, On to Rome.*

*Wife.* My heart beats fast, and I am faint. A dread-  
ful enemy is Rome. O, my darlings! We must break  
our rest. If once the city swallow him, we ne'er shall see  
him more. Come on.

[*Exeunt. Curtain drops.*

SCENE V. *A chamber in the Palace.*

*Enter CLEANDER and MARCIA.* (8)

*Clean.* How! 'What! A woman thou of Roman blood  
Unknowing jealousy! Why, 'tis a snake,  
A fanged snake, coiled sleepless in its slime  
Of jellied green; and whoso treads it once,  
Though zeph'rus light, must ruthless tread again,  
And quick, or ruthless die.

*Mar.* How, good my lord?  
I'm very dull; be plain; unmask to me,  
In mercy.

*Clean.* Out, I say! Nor chicken me!  
Yet if thou wilt, Crispina scans  
Thee evil-eyed; so all our Italy  
Shuddering cries, *Wake, Marcia, strike for us,*  
*And save thyself.*

*Mar.* Yes, yes! If only she  
Be good, a wife keeps Heaven's gate to let  
Her husband in—

*Clean.* But saying he be bad?

*Mar.* Then she is worse of being good—  
My lord, a better wife had made for us  
A better Cæsar. To thy shrewdness now—  
Of Jove's great curses kept for special plague  
Of Roman kind, describe me that the last  
And certain deadliest.

*Clean.* O, Drunkenness.

*Mar.* No.

*Clean.*      Avarice.

*Mar.*      No.

*Clean.*      No? Ambition then.

*Mar.* Nor yet, my lord. Almost I think a man  
Would never guess it.

*Clean.*      Hold! Most excellent  
Fair Marcia, I am not Cleander more,  
Bewray thee not thy face. Nor shake thy head—  
'Tis Woman.

*Mar.*      Thou hast missed by bare a shade.

*Clean.*      O of thy grace again—Now wears the curse  
A personality; wherein most like  
A breathing radiancy corporate  
In vesture of the morning light, it thinks,  
And has a being, and goes about pursued  
By noble souls, and hearkening them call  
Its name—*Crispina*.

*Mar.*      Yes—

[She draws nearer him.

O good my lord!

Admit to me thy hopes in darkness kept.  
O open noble heart, and take me in;  
And I will be another secret there,  
As still as any, yet with senses armed  
To haste conclusions.

*Clean.*      No, no—nothing more  
To me remains—I—Marcia, I have clomb  
The last step—

*Mar.*      Last but one!

[She puts her arm upon his shoulder.

There is a man

For whom the world tiptoe impatient waits.  
A Phrygian humbly born, the kindly Fates,  
With high intent, brought him a boy to Rome,  
And in the palace yoked him with the heir  
Imperial; and there in brotherhood  
They grew so like and like, the shrewest might  
Not tell the first in wit or qualities  
Of men in youth. At last the slave a need  
Of life became; so much that, wanting him,  
Young Cæsar wanted eyes, and ears and hands,

Nor was his perfect self. A teacher thus,  
He too was equal taught; acquiring how  
To govern men, which once attained does stir  
The gods to jealousy, such knowledge 'tis.  
Cleander, thou art he of whom I speak—  
The prince for whom—

*Clean.* Hush! Go to! That you are  
A pretty maudler might not plea you o'er  
The charge of treason—Hush!

*Mar.* Nay, wilt thou hear,  
The gods do speak by me, and bid you up  
From humble dreams too long in thrall indulged—  
Up—up, and on the earth lay hands  
Of mastery;—and then—I—

*Clean.* Well—and thou?  
[He puts his arm about her.]  
*Mar.* We, we,—prince—Cæsar! O as shine the sun  
And moon wil' we, my lesser light in thine!  
Or like not that, my lord, then thou shalt be  
My flower o' men, and I a butterfly  
To live upon thy sweets. Thy unthought wish  
For slave shalt have me. Of thy hand I'll be  
As facile fingers jewelled,  
To gladsome answer ev'ry pulse of heart.  
Or thou shall say when I can help thee best,  
And point the mode, by labor, life or death  
Indifferent.

*Clean.* And if the need were now?

*Mar.* O very, very blind! I'll help thee now.

[He kisses her.]

*Clean.* Strange, my Marcia, how thy beauty grows,  
And draws me. True, thou wert a star  
With five clear rays; but now a sixth begins  
To dawn; and grow thou thus, the sky must be  
Enlarged anew to hold thy flood of light.

[He kisses her passionately.]

Tell me but this—Is 't perfect treaty now,  
That we to end go on, the two as one?

*Mar.* As ship and shadow go; and thou the ship.

*Clean.* A dainty hand, and small, to have such power  
Of help to dizzy height; and qualitied

Divinely, that by speechless tenderness,  
 And signs not more than writing on the air,  
 The ruffled feathers of suspicion it  
 Can instant lay, and even cast a man  
 In sleep of health profound to deeper sleep,  
 Which health not needs, nor any vanity—  
 Not even empire. Runs the treaty so,  
 My Marcia?

*Mar.* So, my lord, and nothing lacks  
 But oaths exchanged.

*Clean.* Oaths! The love which needs  
 An oath to keep it true, but taints the oath  
 In taking. O enough! My soul awakes!  
 I'll dare the other step; and coward men  
 To fighting gods shall turn them, or we'll rule  
 This Roman world—I first of crowned men,  
 And thou of women first—"Tis said and sealed—  
 And now, my fair, a kiss—and then a kiss—  
 Then off to think what we must do to bring  
 Our wedded hopes to harbor.

*Mar.* Good, good-bye!

*Clean.* My queen!

*Mar.* My Caesar!

[*They embrace. Exit Cleander.*

Gods! I loathe a man

Of sweaty baldness, fat to eye and touch;  
 Whose love in heat of making cannot take  
 A sweet  
 From power or greatness more than lilly's juice.  
 The throne with him, the o'er-fed Phrygian beast!  
 I'd sooner house me in a vulture's nest,  
 And feed on poisoned dogs-- And yet without  
 His help I could not move mine enemy;  
 But now 'tis done; now can I cry  
*Exultant, Room, Crispina, room for me!*  
 O I do owe him m<sup>uch</sup>, and more that he  
 Was won so cheap—Live, live great Commodus!  
 Live thou my king of kings—Mars, Hercules,  
 Apollo, all in one—and reign!  
 But die Crispina—die Cleander too!

[*Exit. Curtain falls.*

## ACT III.

SCENE I. *A Village Street and Inn. Porch of Inn projecting into street, but screened from it by lattice-work in front.*

*Enter MATERNUS.*

*Mat.* Lo, here !

*Enter LANDLORD.*

*Land.* Your servant, please you.

*Mat.* I am tired, hungry, thirsty—What have you ?

*Land.* Only the poorest, your goodness. I had plenty—to-day three weeks ago—I think it was three weeks—my poor head, I lost it, and it is hardly come back yet—a band of robbers—they said they belonged to the great Maternus, your goodness—

*Mat.* I am a plain mechanic, friend, bound to Rome for work and better fortune.

*Land.* No harm meant. O, no ! As I was saying—my poor head, it goes and comes so !—To-day three weeks ago—I think that was the time—a band of robbers cleaned our village end to end. They carried the inside of every house into the streets. You should have seen what all they did !

*Mat.* But I am hungry.

*Land.* Pardon, excellency—I was about to say the thieves left me nothing but oatmeal and milk.

*Mat.* Bring them—and haste.

*Land.* Yes, yes !—Pardon again—What's that ? More custom, and nothing but oatmeal and milk. Alack, alack !

[*The Bacchanals enter the street singing. Villagers pour in from all sides. The Bacchanals dance. Landlord runs out, but returns in haste.*

A travelling show, your goodness.  
Take seat. I'll order for you.

[*He puts his head through a door, and calls for meal and milk. Maternus takes seat on a bench. While the dance proceeds, the food is brought, and he eats. Di-*

rectly his wife and children appear, and come to the porch unseen by him. Wife speaks to landlord, who is looking at the dance.

*Wife.* Tell me the way to Rome, an' you please.

*Land.* Go down this to the first crossing, and turn to the right.

*Wife.* I thank you for a good man.

[She moves on as directed, and disappears. Queen of Bacchanals comes to porch.

*Queen.* (To landlord) Sleek and fat! Of your plenty, help us on our way.

*Land.* Your fairness, I have nothing. To-day three weeks ago—I think—

*Queen.* Nothing! You lie, as only a landlord can.

[She goes to Maternus.

Are you of the road?

*Mat.* Yes.

*Queen.* Then of you nothing.

[She turns away, but comes back.

Mercy! I forgot.

A mother, poor, but good, and weary worn  
With travel all afoot, now passed by,  
With three fair children, bound to Rome to find  
Her husband, there a soldier. If of store  
You have to spare, a little give for her  
And them; or if, like us, you have but small,  
A very, very little then will do—  
O bare enough to buy a crust to feed  
Three sparrows!—No! Ah, friend, had you a wife  
To follow all your marching round the world;—  
A babe to toss its tiny arms about,  
And cry your name—sweet, blue-eyed—cheeks with blood  
Of roses painted;—a boy to lift your spear,  
And swear there ne'er was soldier like to you,  
Nor any man so brave!—For such I beg.

*Mat. (Affected)* Wilt thou indeed remember them?

*Queen.* I swear it—by the Holy Gods.

*Mat. (Rising)* The Northman's hand is hard; not so his heart—Take this.

[He gives a handful of silver, and moves away.

*Queen. (Looking after him)* A man to make a hero—

although there was a tear upon his cheek.

[*Curtain falls.*

SCENE II. ROME. *Corridor in Palace.*

*Enter CLEANDER.*

*Clean.* The Senate's mine. (*Laughing*) A jest it was to burst

Silenus ! E'n where Tully silver-voiced,  
A butcher bloody-handed I did squat,  
And in great Cæsar's seat, a hostler loud  
With noisome stable smells. And now what wants  
My preparation more ? There ne'er was hand  
Of help as Marcia's dextrous; never brain  
Of woman wiser to control the hand,  
And put suggestion into coinage of  
Perfected deed. Now give me but the proud  
Prætorian Præfecture, that I may hold  
The legions come or go, adjudged by need  
Of policy, and I'll the riot loose ;  
And since I cannot trust another man,  
The place I'll take myself; first scaling it,  
That men demur not, saying, *He did climb  
To it unworthy.*

[*Enter Cupid, and gives him a note.*

Here, thou little chick !

Kiss thou me, then to Commodus return,  
And say I love to serve him.

*Cupid.* O thou good—  
Thou best of men !

[*Kisses him, and exit.*

*Clean.* And now what ? Some device  
Of villainy, I know.

[*He reads the note.*

COMMODUS to CLEANDER.—*In dispute with me to-day my Burbo said, that of all nations a Gaul dies with the most indifference; a Briton next; a Moor next; then an Assyrian; and then a Roman—the Roman last of all. And I did wager him for Roman sake; and to decide the wager, and prove him false, I have designed a feast of richness to make beggar-lunches of Nero's dinners. The ambassadors of all*

*the nations, and the hostages, will be guests. To-night in the Augustan Hall. Come thou.*      COMMODUS.

*Clean.*      I held myself  
 In arms against surprise or terror proof ;  
 But now from Hell a prompter comes to fuse  
 My Cæsar full of horrid Plutonism.  
 How sweetly, aired about with innocence,  
 He prattles of the thing, and calls it *Feast*.  
 And so 't will be, and nothing like it half  
 So utter splendid ever seen before  
 In time of any man ; yet I do know,  
 From knowing him, that they who take them there,  
 And careless eat and drink, sit down to death,  
 With question mere—  
 What sparkling wine or savored dish shall serve  
 Their taking off ? For me, I'll none of it.  
 I'm sick—with love of life, and will to bed,  
 With foot-bath first, and medic napkin fit  
 For sudden colic—There, the sun is down,  
 And they are at it now—I'm very sick.

[*Exit Cleander.*

*Enter COMMODUS, as a Roman girl, his hand resting on  
 BURBO'S left shoulder.*

*Com.* Burbo, the messenger should be here—Ah, he comes !

*Enter MESSENGER, and kneels.*

*Mess.* The last course is finished. The guests clamor for Cæsar.

*Com.* What dish liked they best ?

*Mess.* The ragout of Verus. <sup>(9)</sup>

*Com.* Sow's belly, flesh of pheasant, wings of peacock, tenderloin of wild boar—in a pie.

*Burb.* Diet good for death.

*Com.* (*Laughing*) Excellent, my Burbo ! (*To Messenger*) Return thou, and report me coming.

[*Exit Messenger.*

I think

my hair disclaims the fillet, and falls disordered. It must be seen to. Let us hence.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE V. *A Hall of State. Guests at table, reclining. A dais, canopied, and with curtains of Tyrian purple. Gorgeous symposium on dais. Music.*

*Enter two officers bearing, one a lion's skin, the other a Hercules club. They post themselves on each side the dais.*

*Officers. Cæsar comes! (Guests arise.)*

*Enter a score of little girls as Cupids; after them Commodus, as a girl, and leaning on Burbo. Commodus ascends the dais, and reclines upon the symposium, resting on his left arm. The Cupids group themselves about him.*

MASTER OF FEAST.

Salute we our host!

[*Flourish of music.*

GERMAN ENVOY.

From lands of Gaul and Goth—Hail, and health, Cæsar!  
[*The Envoy, and all the German hostages bow.*

EGYPTIAN REPRESENTATIVE.

Hail, Master of the World! The children of the Nile  
kiss thy feet.

[*The Egyptians salaam.* (10)

AFRICAN ENVOY.

From the Desert a voice—Hail, Hero of Heroes!  
Forever live!

[*Salaam from him, and the Ethiopian hostages.*

BRITISH HOSTAGE.

The Free-born of the Isles of the Sea, beyond the Pillars  
of the West—O, Cæsar, health, and 'twixt thee and the  
unconquered kings, our fathers, peace!

[*The British hostages bow.*

MASTER OF FEAST.

Finally, for her who alone is great—our mother, Rome,  
the Universal—I salute you, Cæsar!

[*Flourish of music.*

Com. (Aside) Take back the wager, Burbo.

Burb. (Aside) Look you, I came to see them die. *Hoc habet.* (11)

[Turns his thumb up in sign of death.

Com. (To guests) I am most happy in your salutations, and will return them as becomes me—Ho, bring me wine!

[A cup-bearer, as Hebe, brings a golden pitcher, and kneels before him. Other servants enter, and set goblets before the guests.

Com. (To Hebe) For me—then the gentles.

[She pours for each one.

Com. (Aside) Drink not, my Burbo.

Burb. (Aside) Fearest thou?

Com. (Aside) For myself?

Burb. (Aside) Ay, my Cæsar.

Com. (Aside and laughing) When thou dost find thy sword with temper lost from simple wearing, then mayest thou look to find my blood disproof 'gainst treachery. Peace! They wait.

[He rises upon his arm, and holds his goblet up.  
My Lords and Princes

Of the Far and Near!

Mast. of Feast. Peace—Hear! The mighty Cæsar hath to say!

Com. I drink to all the worshipped Gods of men—Those here and there—the Little with the Great, However named; and to the Unknown Good And Unknown Bad in equal honor each; And who shall spare his cup to such a health?

[Master of the Feast hesitates. Commodus addresses him. Art thou a Roman? Drink!

[All drink. Master of the Feast drops in his seat.

Burb. (Aside) See thy Roman!

Com. (Aside) He is wiser than the rest.

Burb. (Aside) His heart fails—I win!

Com. (Aside) Nay, the end is not yet. (To guests) Sit now; and while the richness of which you have partaken proves itself, I will give you entertainment. Afterwards we will drink again. (To attendants) Music first.

[Harpers come and play. Various performances follow, such as juggling, wrestling, trapezia.

Com. (Upon the concluding performance) Now the Corybantes.<sup>(12)</sup> (To attendants) Let my children come. (Aside to Burbo) 'Tis time the wine should stir them.

[Enter a score of gladiators, with shields, and armed, and in full armor, as for the arena. With them cymbalists, drummers and trumpeters. The gladiators form and dance; slowly at first, finally with the utmost fury, the music increasing time and force to the end. As dance progresses, the poison manifests itself.

Com. (Upon conclusion of dance) Bring the wine again.

[Cup-bearer re-appears, and serves the goblets.

Commodus rises to his feet.

Once more, my gentles—a health to you and—Death!

[The Roman and the Germans keep their seats. The other guests rise alarmed. A few lift their cups.

Burb. (Aside) Lo! thy Roman again.

Com. (Aside) Lo! thy Gauls. (To guests) Give ear, Princes and Lords.

[They suppress their groans and gaze at him.

You have drunk that

Men cannot drink and live. You are about To die.

[Those risen sink down half fainting.

What—fear? Are you of common soul

To be so overcome? Bethink you of The lands you represent—and of the fame Of courage—and the glory they do win Who smile heroic in the face of Death. Or fearful yet, recall the honor which Attends your going—I am here!

[They break from their places, and rush wildly about, seeking escape. Some fall and die. The Britons, the Germans, and the Master of the Feast sit still, and gaze steadfastly at Commodus. The German Envoy rises.

German Envoy. Men of the North, ho! List a word from me!

The cup yon Roman monster offered us, With gloze of honor to our viking gods, We drank and are to die, and dying make Him merry with our fears. No Druid wood Is hereabout to catch our ghosts when they Shall parting fly; nor may a harping skalde,

With crash of cloudy battle, din us deaf,  
 Or gently bear us up to look on life  
 As soaring eagles on the crawling sea,  
 That we may laugh, and careless bid it bye,  
 As phrenzied warriors do ; yet are we  
 To be afraid ? who were not fed on milk  
 Of bleating ewes ? or timid dropt from nests  
 Of cooing doves ? whose sires do tireless run  
 The roughened ways which lead to halls where Death  
 Abides as bidden guest, than wife or friend,  
 Or sleep or rest, or any joy of men  
 On earth more welcome ? Not in vain the Goth  
 And Gaul and blue-eyed wanderers from far  
 Slavonic wilds our snow-lands loving crowd.  
 'Tis Odin draws them where the makers three  
 Of man may make again ; this time a race  
 To gird the pliant Earth, and plough it deep,  
 And burn it maiden clean, as farmers sent  
 To sow perfection. Masterful to break  
 And change at will—here pull down, there set up—  
 And in the wasted gardens of the Old  
 To plant the New, they restless come,  
 Through battle led,—come bringing each  
 The hammer and the hammer-hand of Thor,  
 By which the world shall know them. Then shall we  
 Avenged be, and merry make in turn.  
 Nor long the waiting — scarce a winter night.  
 E'en now the ravens black the Medgard sky,  
 Home hurtling swift to tell of them in sight,  
 And at the Father's feet the sleeping wolves  
 Do whimpering dream them nigh. So let us rise,  
 And fearless laugh and drink this second cup,  
 As we were warriors at victorious feast,  
 And it were healthful mead of brewage fresh,  
 By happy housewife poured—The Coming Race  
 And Vengeance ! Drink we all !

[*The Northmen rise and lift their cups.*

*British Hostage.* Hold ! Stay the cup awhile !  
 One day a'ship to Angle shore drew out  
 The seaward of the East— with pillared prow,  
 And beak like tusk of boar, and mighty banks

Of oaken oars—from out the East she sailed,  
 And to an Angle King on British shore  
 Did land a Saxon bride; and after her  
 Came other brides. And since that happy day,  
 In Glory's sounding looms of pain and toil,  
 From whence the race heroic is to come,  
 O Northmen, yours and ours have constant woofed  
 And constant warped, until, though island born,  
 We are from you inseparate.

And now to make Death welcome as a bride,  
 A Saxon bride, with thrice a woman's love,  
 Your Future, golden-gated, open wide,  
 That we alike may share your lordly Hope.  
 A cry there is which fits no tongue but ours.  
 Together let us cheer—together drink—  
 And then together die. Together all—  
 Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!

[*They clash their goblets, Hurrahing.*  
 The promised Perfect Man—the Woden-kissed  
 And British-cradled—Ho, a cheer for him!

[*They hurrah.*  
 For Death a cheer!

[*They give it.*  
 But Rome—to Rome our curse

And—goblets!

[*He throws his goblet at Commodus. The others do the same, and exhausted die.*

*Mast. of Feast.* (13) Cæsar, hear!  
 A Roman, taught by Romans, knows to die  
 Without or fear or passion. So will I  
 My farewell take of earth.

[*He lifts his goblet.*  
 These fallen ones

Were guests of Rome. If some there were more full  
 Of trust, none, none so helpless; wherefore none  
 So sacred. Not to pity were a crime;  
 To slay them drinking to our Roman gods,  
 And of their dying make a Roman jest,  
 Must leave us damned and godless. I will drink,  
 Most guilty Roman—drink, and hide my shame.

[*He drinks, sits, draws his toga over his head, and dies.*

*Burb.* My Cæsar, I have won.

*Com.* No, I have won.

*Burb.* My men their goblets at you flung.

*Com.* Ay, but my Roman without passion died.

[*Curtain drops.*

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## ACT IV.

SCENE I. *Road through a Rocky Pass. A spring at one side.*

Enter BACCHANALS, who cross carelessly singing, On to Rome. After them MATERNUS, his wife and children, boy leading donkey. The wife and children stop to drink. MATERNUS, while waiting, comes forward..

*Mat.* A faithful heart, to follow me so far!  
And yet I wish her home—Home! What have I  
To call by such a holy name?  
The hollows of the ground, the jungle depths,  
The wilds where hunters stalk their prey in fear,  
There only can Maternus rear a roof,  
And hiding, drink the offered cup of love.  
But off—away with plaint! The Alpine hills  
Are left behind, and this is Italy!  
Good Mother of the Earth! Take thanks for care—  
Thanks now—but when the mistress Rome is mine—  
Mine her state, people, power—then of some  
Tall mountain, purple veiled and summer crowned,  
An altar I will make, and offer thee  
The rackings of her robber life sword-reaped  
Pitiless through the blood red centuries.  
Nor dreams the tyrant of the doom I bring.  
O comrades brave! The flying moments draw

Us nearer, nearer to our templed goal ;  
 And on the thousand ways by which ye come,  
 In valley's depth, through city's crowded heart,  
 By wooded shores of southward running streams,  
 Nearer, clearer comes your soldier tramp,  
 Not needing beat of drum to tell me where  
 And what ye are ; and over space I stretch  
 My eager arms in yearning for the glad  
 Salute which is to make us one again—  
 O good Cybele ! Mother !—Fail us not,  
 Nor let us fail !

*[Wife comes to his side, and rests her hand upon his arm.]*

Ah, love, in wait were you  
 On idle dreams of mine ? Well, let us on.  
 A rest, a long, long rest awaits us 'neath  
 The walls of Rome—Sweetheart, had you your will,  
 What would you?

*Wife.* O, my arms around you thus,  
 And home again.

*Mat.* Not if you knew we went  
 To changed fortune ?

*Wife.* That is what I dread.  
 O husband, though I sung it sweet as bird  
 Sweet singing to its mate, and kissed you oft,  
 And oft again, yet never would you come  
 To know that love for love in holy kind  
 Is all of fortune simple woman wants ;  
 And constant give her that, and change is what  
 She constant prays against.

*Mat.* I know it well ;  
 But then the cave was cold for us and ours ;  
 And colder still the clime ; and to a land  
 Of roses now we come, where summer bides  
 In purple tents, or dreamful lies asleep  
 On sunny hills, while, blushing in their gold,  
 The swelling berries turn to amber wine.  
 Give me your eyes—this way—there—call you that  
 A changeling's kiss ? O, in the city's heart,  
 Fixed centre of the world, there is a house,  
 Marble out and marble in, where none  
 But master kings have dwelt and merry made :

And all its pillared gates and sculptured doors  
 Ajar do waiting stand for you and me,  
 And these, our weary, weary little ones ;  
 And we will enter in, and be at rest,  
 And call it ours, and with the great be great,  
 Yet happy each in other—Let us on—  
 Hear you there ? Forward, boy ; and sing for cheer,  
 And we will follow fast.

[*Exeunt. Boy singing, On to Rome.*

SCENE II. *The country palace at Laurentum.*<sup>(14)</sup> A Hall regally furnished. *Commodus reclining upon a couch. About him, in close groups, little girls as Cupids, and women as Syrens, the latter waving fans. Low music.*

*Com.* How soft the air ! A feather dropt would plunge  
 It like a stone. And heavy 't is with rich  
 Narcosis. Hardly know I if I wake.  
 My senses dulling close like lilies which  
 Will not the stars should see where they were kissed  
 By smiling sun—To Marcia, one of you,  
 And bring me word if yet her play be set.  
 And speed you ! To perfect the fancy she  
 Has had her will, and time, and artists deft,  
 With right to make me poor, lest she should want  
 The least or greatest thing. I burn to see  
 What she has wrought. The lazy meanwhile fill  
 With lulling sounds—Nay, sound is minister  
 To sleep, now out of time—  
 And bring me wine in cup of crystal poured—  
 Not that from frosty vinelands of the North ;  
 But blood of blue-black clusters ripened quick  
 On Ætna's lava-lips.

*Enter CLEANDER.*

*Clean.* My Cæsar, hail and health !  
 You sent for me, and I from Rome have come  
 To prove my love anew.

[*He kneels by the couch.*

*Com.* A trifle—nigh forgot. It was—*Perpol* !  
 I cannot call it now, for I am numb

With leaden sleep.

*Clean.* The property of babes,  
And happy men with minds as innocent—  
A word of news, and I'll to Rome again.

*Com.* The briefest word, if you are witted well.

*Clean.* The queen Crispina <sup>(15)</sup> is not true.

*Com.* (*Sitting up*) Be plain.

*Clean.* She has a lover.

*Com.* Nothing more?

[*Laughing.*]

You fluttered me.

*Clean.* Thy Burbo—

*Com.* Ah, the drowse

Returns again! To Capri with the queen.

Send Burbo hither. He is still a prince  
Of mighty men. I'll make him chief of guard—  
How goes the rabble?

*Clean.* They do charge the day  
With direful threats; of nights they post the walls  
From cope to base, until the dead stones stand  
And preach alive with tongues.

*Com.* Draw they to head?

*Clean.* Ay, Cæsar, insomuch  
That I will take the chiefest place on which  
Thy safety most depends; for trust thou me,  
I know to trust myself.

[*He produces a tablet, and gives it to Commodus.*  
It needs your hand.]

*Com.* Some other time—not now.

*Clean.* The need is great;  
And saying sooth, I wish to make an end  
To mobs in Rome. This one I'll tread in mire  
Of blood so deep, t'will ne'er take root again.

*Com.* My stylus then.

*Clean.* Nay, Cæsar, take thou mine.  
[*Commodus signs, and gives the tablet to Cleander.*]

*Com.* Now thou art  
The chief Prætorian, and next to me.  
Return to Rome, and watch that business come  
Not here to plague me—Stay! Will not the life  
At Capri lonesome be?

*Cleander kisses his hand.*  
*Clean.* It would to me,  
 My Cæsar.  
*Com.* Let the Parcae cut it short.  
 Now for sleep—Begone.

*[Exit Cleander.]*

*Enter cup-bearer, as Hebe, with wine and a crystal cup.*  
*She pours for him. Enter a Courtier.*  
*Courtier. (Kneeling)* A message from Marcia. The  
 play is ready. Thy will, O Cæsar!  
*Com. (Rising)* I will come. Greet her for me.

*[While he drinks, curtain falls.]*

### SCENE III. THE MASQUE OF OLYMPUS.

1. Darkness as a thick cloud. Thunder.
2. Light penetrating the cloud, and slowly dissolving it.
3. Dimly seen at first, but finally the center of a most brilliant light, JUPITER upon his throne, with JUNO.
4. Overhead an atmosphere in which faintest spangles appearing and disappearing give the idea of motion and purity.
5. Trees and shrubbery grown and growing. Flowers swelling in bud, and bursting into bloom. Flitting birds. Butterflies at work.
6. From the rocks and trees nymphs appear, and pose themselves in attitudes of rest and watchfulness.
7. Caves, grottoes, cascades.
8. Everything in transformation constant and brilliant.
- a* Enter MINERVA from the right, MARS from the left.
- b* Enter MERCURY and VULCAN.
- c* Enter NEPTUNE.
- d* Enter DIANA.
- e* Enter APOLLO.
- f* Enter PLUTO.
- g* Enter VENUS, leading CUPID.
- h* Enter SILENUS, leading BACCHUS, the latter with grapes and fresh grapevines, and reeling drunk.
9. A table of gold, covered with bowls and chalices of gold, rises from the floor.
- i* Enter COMMODUS and HERCULES, from opposite sides.

*j* Enter GANYMEDE, with a tall golden pitcher on his shoulder.

10. The gods and goddesses collect about the table, and are served from the pitcher.

*Jupiter.* Stay! Let the nectar stand. Again the Earth  
A hero has for old Olympus fit.  
Advance, thou noblest of a thousand years!—  
Advance, and claim thy godship.

[*Commodus kneels before Jupiter, who continues—*  
Take thou high

Divinity. HERMECRATES—rise!

[*Jupiter touches him with his scepter. Commodus rises, Gods and Goddesses salute him. Hercules throws his lion's skin over Commodus' shoulders. Mercury gives him his caduceus. Ganymede puts a cup in his hand, and fills it.*

*Jupiter.* (To *Commodus*) O, Hermecrates! <sup>(16)</sup>eat and drink, and earth and earthly life forget.

*All the Gods.* Conqueror of gladiators—Hail, and welcome!

[*Curtain drops.*

## ACT V.

SCENE I. *A nook under the Walls of Rome.* MARCUS  
and other CAPTAINS seated.

*Enter MATERNUS.*

*Mat.* Hail, comrades! Hail, and hearty cheer to each  
And all of you!

[*They rise, and press him with their greetings.*  
The morn before the Nones

Of April this; and there, the trysting gate  
Of old Flaminus. Thanks each to each,  
And to Cybele thanks and solemn vows—  
And now, my brothers—such you are in faith

As well as Fortune—unto other time,  
 The day of golden leisure, let us pass  
 All mention of the road, nor think of else  
 Than that which waits us clamoring—  
 Speak we our soldiers first—

*Marc.* They swarm the streets  
 By thousands.

*Mat.* O, for that with us they broke  
 Our crust of sorrow, now to blazoned  
 Lordships will I them!—Marcus, they should have  
 The time and meeting place.

*Marc.* And so they have.

*Mat.* And arms and uniforms?

*Marc.* To cellars named they'll come for them to-night.

*Mat.* Have they the word?

*Marc.* Aye, Captain, every part  
 Is done you gave to me.

*Mat.* A good right hand  
 Art thou, my Marcus. I do rest on thee  
 As on myself. They smiled, I think you said?  
 Was that their spirit? Did their faces flush?  
 Spoke they quick, sharp? and when they took your hand,  
 Thought you if closed their fingers thus—and thus—  
 As itching for the sword? You know there are  
 Who dash you with their doubts, and crawling go  
 To tasks heroic. I do like them not;  
 For look you all, my brethren, they have want  
 Of fixed mind; and in the urgent heat  
 Of action; when the winging chances all  
 The fiercer fan their craven cheeks,  
 And comes the crisis with its thunder clap,  
 They stop to think, and with themselves debate;  
 And then the gods do hiss, and slip their dooms,  
 And shoot them swift into the weakling's hell.

*Marc.* I judged them good of spirit.

*Mat.* Stay they so,  
 My captains, then will we a deed to sound  
 All Wonder's brassy pipes—But part we now.  
 To-morrow we may stay, and talk in groups,  
 As suits us whimsical; but not to-day.  
 The sharpest eyes of Rome are in her gates—

To each and all, good-night.

1 *Capt.* One word before we go. A Cæsar there  
Must always be. Will not Maternus do?

*Captains.* Why not?

1 *Capt.* Say you so?  
Let's give him hands on it.

*Captains.* Ay, every hand!  
Live Maternus!

[All but *Marcus* give him their hands, with speeches such  
as, *We are with you—Count on us.*]

*Mat.* (To *Marcus*) Thy hand came not to me.  
I felt the want of it—Again, good rest.

[*Exeunt all but Marcus.*]

*Marc.* I saw, when with my hand he played,  
Suspicion in his eyes. How he has grown!  
The other day he was not more than I—  
To brush the mighty Cæsar from his throne  
Were Cæsar's self to be—I'll watch a time  
To loose the feathers in his wing.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE II. ROME. *Chamber in the Palace. Commodus*  
*upon a couch playing with children. Courtiers in attend-*  
*ance. Noise of a battle heard at intervals.*

1 *Courtier.* Gods! How the tumult deepens at the  
gate!

2 *Court.* 'Tis bloody war. (17)

3 *Court.* But see! There lies he calm  
As in the universe such dreadful thing  
As danger was not. Do but hear how shrill  
And merrily-voiced his Cupids laugh and shout.

[*Up roar without.*]

Great Jupiter!

1 *Court.* He calls—Hist! I'll attend.

[*He goes to Commodus and kneels.*]

*Com.* (To *Courtier*) I think I heard  
You speak of Bacchanals arrived in Rome.

[*Quick swell of the fight.*]

2 *Court.* Hear him, ye gods!

3 *Court.* The battle holds my ear.

2 Court. Is't courage ?

3 Court. No, 'tis madness.

Com. (Pausing from his play) You did speak,

I think, of dancing girls from Cyprus come,  
And noising all the town.

1 Court. The Bacchanals ?

Com. However called, engage you them for me  
To-morrow.

1 Court. I will have it done, my lord.

Com. Without delay.

[Exit 1st Courtier.

2 Court. 'Tis madness, I believe;  
And he will die in it.

3 Court. We're all dead men,  
I fear.

[Uproar continued.

Enter MARCIA and FADILLA. (18)

Mar. O good my Cæsar !

[She kneels by him.

Com. You are pale  
And breathless, Marcia. Jealous thou of these ?  
Shame on thee !

Enter 1ST COURTIER in alarm.

2 Court. How goes the fight ?

1 Court. The guards retreat within  
The gates, which hardly to their hinges cling.

Mar. Dear, dear, my lord, he says the gates give way.

Com. Thou foolish ! (To Courtiers) Haste and bid  
Cleander come.

Mar. O Cæsar, 'tis of him I wish to speak—  
Nor I alone.

[She pulls Fadilla to her side.

This other has a word

I pray you, Cæsar, hear.

Com. (Sitting up) Death ne'er himself  
More perfect looked ! And with my father's eyes—  
So crying piteous, I would turn from them,  
But cannot. To upbraid me, comest thou ?

Fad. O Cæsar—brother ! I have come from calm

Of cloister life, a Christian, prayerful  
For all the sinful world. To serve and save  
You I have come.

*Com.*                           Thou?

*Fad.*                           Yes, if yet I can.

*Com.* Speak.

*Fad.*                           Weak am I in all but Christian love.  
I know not if my strength will hold the while  
My purpose I declare; yet well the last  
Of life were spent if it effect to save  
Our Rome and thee.

[*She totters. He catches her.*

*Com.*                           I listen ne'er so close,  
Fadilla—Be calm—rest—and lean on me.

*Fad.* My brother, all Rome, armed is at thy gates,  
And thou art lost unless—

[*Increase of noise without.*  
Unless Cleander die.

Hear what he has done. Hear the people cry  
You justice on the traitor.

*Com.*                           A traitor!  
Dost charge him so?—And with thy dying breath?

*Fad.* I charge him so; and bid the battle bear  
Me witness. Know thou now—God grant it soon  
Enough—this madness of revolt hath come  
Of wrongs by him devised to break the heart  
Of Roman patience.

*Enter BURBO, in gladiator's armor.*

*Burb.*                           Hail, good my Cæsar!  
Get thy armor on!

*Com.*                           [*Commmodus gives Fadilla to Marcia.*  
What, beaten? Thou and they,  
Of men the flower?—children trained by me?—  
And whom I thought to set in open field  
Against a legion—e'en the Julian larks?—  
But now in flight before a headless mob?

*Burb.* (*Laughing*) The mob! Tush! Bare of breast  
and throat are they;  
And fighting them is merely thrusting thus—  
And thus—and so! I drip with spurted blood.

To us the mob! But, Cæsar, I do bid  
You wake to treachery.

*Com.* To treachery!

*Burb.* The Præfect of thy guard in camp  
His legions holds.

*Com.* Let loose, immortal gods,  
And blast the base-born ingrate with thy quick  
Consuming fires! O I remember now,  
With what ado of love, and plausible  
Fair seeming show of duty, he did come  
To me in refuge at Laurentum place,  
And pray the Præfecture,<sup>(19)</sup> and I denied  
His prayer; nor once; then of the mob  
Inceptive he did speak—O, he'd an end  
Of mobs in Rome!—This one now thundering  
Warlike my gates outside, he'd tread in mire  
Of blood so deep 't would ne'er take root again!  
And I did sign—Fadilla, have thy will—  
(*To Burbo*) Where keeps the traitor?

*Burb.* Upon the roof, my Cæsar, triply fenced  
By guards which should be thine.

*Com.* A thing for swift  
And certain deed—My Burbo, take thou flight  
Of arrow hence, and bring his head to me.  
Hearest thou? Speed!—Ay—but—would I were by  
To see his dying!—Burbo, do thou watch,  
And note his changes—hear what last he says—  
And see if light or hard his parting be,  
Or brave or fearful—Off!—Away!

*Mar.* (*Taking Burbo's hand*) With all its dripping, I do  
kiss thy hand  
• *Com.* (*To courtiers*) Not cowering quails, but royal  
game Death hunts  
With baying hounds to-day. Haste! Sword and shield!  
I'll meet him armed, and die, if die I must,  
In sort to live a braggart's boast upon  
His grinning lips. Be off—nor loiter so!  
I thirst for blood!

[*A courtier runs out. Commodus turns to Fadilla.*

Alas, poor fallen one!  
Thy gaze does turn my mood to tearful grief,

And teach a love which I have lived to this  
Unknowing—Good friends, bear her to yon couch.

[*Attendants obey him. He follows them, and stands by her.*

This is not dying—or was never death  
So gentle,—or 'tis meant to teach me what  
It should be. Stay—a moment ere thou go,  
And tell me I'm forgiv'n.

*Fad.* For love of Christ—  
Forgiven.

[*Fadilla dies.*

*Enter BURBO, with Cleander's head.*

*Burb.* Lo, Cæsar, I bring you—peace.

*Com.* So!

[*Commodus holds the head by the hair, while he examines the face.*

*Mar.* My lord, a wondrous specious tongue it had.  
Thy workmen coin not silver pieces half  
So artfully as it at need did coin  
The basest lies.

[*A great tumult without. Commodus takes the head to a table, and setting it on the base of the neck, draws a chair before it, and continues his study.*

*Com.* For this together grew  
We statured men? Open, eyes! Answer, tongue!  
Tell me of that so lately life.  
Where is it now, and what, if 't is at all?  
Can it be down, some serving quality  
In lawless current blowing with the air?  
A breath's sweet virtue here? Or there a blight  
Of poison? Dost hear me? Or did Death,  
With kindly hand, but ope a viewless door,  
And let it silent into other world,  
A better being or a worse?  
I do bid thee—I, Cæsar,—break the law  
Which 'gainst me speechless locks thy purple lips—  
Yes or no! Is there another life?

[*Tumult without.*

*Mar.* (Clasping his knees) O good my lord! my Cæsar!  
save thyself  
This favoring time.

*Com.* I lifted thee above  
Thy station. Nay, I bent the stubborn world,  
And set thy foot upon it. At thy word,  
In whisper said, the millions crouching quaked.  
Now not a sign! Go to, thou damned clod!  
Enrich some lentil patch of teeming earth,  
Or feed a weed, or paint a lily's cup—  
Of uses last—My Burbo, thine it is—  
Take now, and throw it to the swine without.  
'Twill stay their grunting for the time at least.  
(To *Courtier*) My sword!—Stay, Burbo. Died he like a  
man?

*Burb.* Like a man, good my Cæsar.

*Com.* This one died  
Forgiving me. What man would do so much?

[Exit *Burbo* with the head. *Commodus* remains by the  
couch, playing with the point of his sword, and looking  
at *Fadilla*.

*Enter COURTIER.*

*Court.* The mob is gone!

*Com.* I thought so. This poor dead  
One shall to lovers of her sect, (30) that they  
May bury her with rites as they may choose.  
Marcia, do thou look to 't.

*Mar.* I will, my lord.

*Com.* (To his sword) Put up, good servant. I have yet  
a time  
To riper grow. (To *courtier*) Return it whence it came.  
(To *Children*) The Fates relent. Come, let us play again.  
To-morrow old Cybele reigns.

[*Children run to him joyously.* *Curtain falls.*

SCENE III. Street in Rome. People passing in holiday  
garb.

*Enter MATERNUS and MARCUS, in rich Praetorian uniforms,  
and armed, helms, swords and shields.*

*Marc.* My Marcus, while we sat before the camp  
 Awhile ago, our people passing by  
 So oft saluted us the air to me  
 Seemed burthened with the word, and, saying truth,  
 I 'gan like it not. *Mors, Mors!* Ah, we could  
 Have something chose to wakeful ears less charged  
 With warning. Marked you e'er a bee go by  
 On humming wing, but of its sting you thought ?  
 Howbeit, 't is an error gone too far  
 For 'mendment—What's the hour ?

*Marc.* I think the fourth.  
*Marc.* No, thou 'rt slow—or my patience is distort.

[*He shades his eyes, and looks upward*  
 I saw the heralds of the sun at dawn,  
 When first they shook their lances in the sky ;  
 Then came the sun himself; and as he rose,  
 A single cloud of more than fleecy white,  
 Asleep above me, like a ship becalmed,  
 Did sudden start, and ship-like softly sail  
 Away to him. Now did some god suggest  
 The cloud our fortune was ? I stopped to see  
 What came of it ; and as they nearer drew,  
 The cloud did slowly change from white to pink,  
 And then to rosy red ; a veil of flame,  
 At last it hid the glorious burning disk,  
 And in a vermeil shade I wondering stood.  
 An instant—then the brightness broke again,  
 And upward rose the sun, and onward sailed  
 The cloud—on --on until, in perfect peace,  
 It passed from view adown the morning sky.  
 And I did cry for joy.

[*A soldier in Praetorian garb goes by.*  
*Mors!*

*Soldier.* Did you hear,  
*Marc.* My Marcus ?

*Marc.* He is for the rendezvous.  
*Marc.* And so, by this, I judge are all of ours.  
 I fancy them on every pave in Rome,  
 Toward the palace faced. Let us likewise.

[*They face about.*

*Marc.* Some masquers come !

*Mat.*

Let's wait for them to pass.

[They draw aside, while a procession goes by shouting, singing, and with trumpets, drums and banners, and in grotesque disguises.

*Marc.* Say you we fall in after them?

*Mat.* Yes—I am ready. O, ye holy gods  
Who love the brave, go with us now!

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV. *Hall of State in Imperial Palace. Throne in centre, curtained right and left. Guards behind curtains.*

*Enter Officers, with lion's skin and club of Hercules.*

*Officer.* Way, way, for Cæsar! Cæsar comes! Make way.

[Enter boys and girls as Cupids, and after them OFFICERS, COURTIERS, GLADIATORS, and CHARIOTEERS—BURBO conspicuous. After them, COMMODUS, in Praetorian garb, MARCIA on his arm; and with her he ascends the throne. Cupids, etc., group about them.

*Com.* (To Marcia) Shall they begin?

*Marc.* If 'tis your pleasure, good my lord.

*Com.* (To officers) Bid them come.

*Enter QUEEN OF BACCHANALS; she goes to the throne and kneels.*

*Queen.* Hail, mighty Cæsar! There was never love Like that of Cyprus; we do kiss your feet, And give it all to you.

\* [She rises, and claps her hands. Music. Enter Bacchanals, as Priestesses of Aphrodite, and dance. Commodus and spectators applaud.

*Enter MATERNUS and MARCUS.*

*Mat.* (Aside) O cursed tyrant! Art thou met at last? And as I prayed? Upon thy curtained throne— Amidst thy guard—in lap degenerate— Set round with trinketry forbid to Kings

And common gods? O happy, happy chance!  
 My Marcus, calm thy joy, as I will mine;  
 And let us to the dais with air of ease  
 To vouch us here of right habitual.

Thy sword—be jealous of the scabbard's clasp.

*Marc.* (Aside) 'Tis ready— free.

*Mat.* (Aside) My Marcus, mine  
 the hand

To strike the blow; and then, the freeze of fear  
 Enduring—sovereign moment when the gods  
 Do give the many to the cherished few!—  
 Then we'll ope the gates, and call on ours,  
 And show them where their oft-dreampt joyance lies—  
 Enough of words! Let's to 't!

*Marc.* I do believe

Him fortune-favored. 'Tis time for me  
 To make a choice. Yon fellow bears him like,  
 A Cæsar born. He has the throne—and odds.  
 I'll take to him.

[*The audience applaud the Bacchanals; at the end of which Marcus speaks to a courtier.*

My friend, care you for King?

*Court.* Who art thou?

*Marc.* Mors!

*Court.* Mors! Mors!—A stranger thou!—

Ho, Cæsar!—Burbo!—Here is mystery—  
 Treachery—Guard, guard!

[*The dance stops. Children and women scream,—confusion—guards enter from behind the curtains, and post themselves around the throne. Commodus stands up. Maternus draws his sword, and turns on Marcus.*

*Mat.* O—now is the world's

Best hope spoiled, and Heaven all afrown,  
 And solid earth gulf-opening into  
 Blackened depths! O thou—thou traitor less  
 To me than universal human kind—  
 Death didst thou call; and take it shalt thou sure—  
 Aye, with god-send swift to Hell!

[*Stabs Marcus.*

*Marc.*

Cæsar saved—

Maternus lost!

[*Dies.*

*Mat.* Lost ! O, the world is lost !  
 And Hope's sweet promises !—and martial dreams  
 Of helmed war, with conquests empire-crowned—  
 And O poor, poor wife ! This the mead of all  
 Thy faithfulness and love !—But boots it naught  
 So Cæsar with me die !

[*He clears space about him.*

Gladiators !—Guards !—Cæsar ! Look—behold  
 Maternus !

*Burb.* Thou Maternus ! 'Tis—'tis so !  
 My Cæsar—Cæsar, 'ware, and out with sword,  
 Or take you hence. This hawk is Death a-wing.

*Com.* The robber ! Insolent ! Set on him all !  
 His life or yours—Slay him !

[*Guards hang back. Burbo snatches a sword—advances toward Maternus—falters.*

*Burb.* His eyes are godlike terrible.

*Mat.* I know you, Burbo—mother's youngest born ;  
 And by her blood, in us the very same,  
 And by my senior's right, I bid you turn,  
 And that way strike with me, as she would cry  
 You strike.

[*He advances—Burbo retreats.*

A cruel Roman hand did tear  
 Us children helpless weeping from her arms,  
 In dying vainly stretched to hold us fast ;  
 And 'neath a haughty Roman foot oppressed  
 Our free-born fighting father death-struck died.  
 There she is—Rome, the Vast,—the Each and All,  
 Imbruted into one ; and here are we,  
 With ready swords and oft-tried, practised hands,  
 And frenzied Hate fire-eyed trumpeting us,  
*Forward both—end of him is end of her !*  
 Hearest thou ?

[*Burbo gives way.*

*Burb.* Back, I say, and I will be  
 Your fence 'gainst all—e'en Cæsar's mighty self.

*Mat.* A base-grown, sodden tongue to speak me so !  
 That way a barren death ; and this way death,  
 But death revenge and glory sweetened.

Choose you quick—Commodus or me !

[*He rushes on, kills Burbo, and throws himself upon the guard.*]

*Mar.* The guards give way ! O, Cæsar, let us fly !  
His look is deadly as his certain sword.

[*She flings her arms around him.*]

*Com.* A Cæsar cannot fly from clash  
Of reddening blades. Woman, loose thy arms !—  
Bring sword for me ! A thousand such I've slain ;  
Now this one comes in noon of fighting time  
To swell the measure o' my rugged boast.  
Give me a sword—Strike now—quick—well done there !

*Habet—hoc habet ! Up thumbs merciless !*

*Mat.* O, O ! I stop at heart. At last has oped  
An easy door, and life good fortune joins  
In farewell flight.  
Done for am I—but he—O doomful gods !  
Shall he escape—of all the breathing world  
The topmost curse ?

[*With last effort he reaches the dais.*  
Late—too late—darkness comes !

[*He falls blindly upon the step.*  
O damned Cæsar ! Take thou—this !

[*Dashes his sword into the throne, and dies.*

SCENE IV. Tableau. *Night—A lonesome place—Moonlight discloses wife of Maternus, weeping over his body. Close by, and part of the group, his children, the younger on the donkey. Solemn music.*

THE END.

APPENDIX.  
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(1) Page 7,

The story of Maternus is told originally by *Herodian*.

DE QUINCEY, GIBBON and CREVIER have versions of the story.

DE QUINCEY'S is as follows:

"A slave of noble qualities, and of magnificent person, having liberated himself from the degradations of bondage, determined to avenge his own wrongs by inflicting continual terror upon the town and neighborhood which had witnessed his humiliation. For this purpose he resorted to the woody recesses of the province (somewhere in the modern Transylvania,) and, attracting to his wild encampment as many fugitives as he could, by degrees he succeeded in forming and training a very formidable troop of freebooters. Partly from the energy of his own nature, and partly from the neglect and remissness of the provincial magistrates, the robber captain rose from less to more, until he had formed a little army, equal to the task of assaulting fortified cities. In this stage of his adventures, he encountered and defeated several of the imperial officers commanding large detachments of troops; and at length grew of consequence sufficient to draw upon himself the emperor's eye, and the honor of his displeasure. In high wrath and disdain at the insult offered to his eagles by this fugitive slave, Commodus fulminated against him such an edict as left him no hope of much longer escaping with impunity.

Public vengeance was now awakened; the imperial troops were marching from every quarter upon the same center; and the slave became sensible that in a very short space of time he must be surrounded and destroyed. In this desperate situation he took a desperate resolution; he assembled his troops, laid before them his plan, concerted the various steps for carrying it into effect, and then dismissed them as independent wanderers. So ends the first chapter of the tale.

The next opens in the passes of the Alps, whither, by various routes, of seven or eight hundred miles in extent, these men had threaded their way in manifold disguises through the very midst of the emperor's camps. According to this man's gigantic enterprise, in which the means

were as audacious as the purpose, the conspirators were to rendezvous, and first to recognize each other at the gates of Rome. From the Danube to the Tiber did this band of robbers severally pursue their perilous routes through all the difficulties of the road and the jealousies of the military stations sustained by the mere thirst of vengeance—vengeance against that mighty foe whom they knew only by his proclamation against themselves. Everything continued to prosper; the conspirators met under the walls of Rome; the final details were arranged; and those also would have prospered but for a trifling accident. The season was one of general carnival in Rome; and by the help of those disguises which the license of this festal time allowed, the murderers were to have penetrated as maskers to the emperor's retirement, when a casual word or two awoke the suspicions of a sentinel. One of the conspirators was arrested; under the terror and uncertainty of the moment he made much ampler discoveries than were expected of him; the other accomplices were secured; and Commodus was delivered from the uplifted daggers of those who had sought him by months of patient wanderings, pursued through all the depths of the Illyrian forests, and the difficulties of the Alpine passes. It is not easy to find words commensurate to the energetic hardships of a slave—who, by the way of answer and reprisal to an edict which consigned him to persecution and death, determines to cross Europe in quest of its author, though no less a person than the master of the world—to seek him out in the inner recesses of his capital city and private palace—and there to lodge a dagger in his heart, as the adequate reply to the imperial sentence of proscription against himself."

DE QUIN *The Caesars.*

Gibbon's rendering of this story is subjoined:

\* \* \* \* \* "Maternus, a private soldier, of a daring boldness above his station, collected these bands of robbers into a little army, set open these prisons, invited the slaves to assert their freedom, and plundered with impunity the rich and defenceless cities of Gaul and Spain. The governors of the provinces who had long been the spectators, and perhaps the partners, of his depredations, were at length, roused from their supine indolence by the threatening commands of the emperor. Maternus found that he was encompassed and foresaw that he must be overpowered. A great effort of despair was his last resource. He ordered his followers to disperse, to pass the Alps in small parties and various disguises, and to assemble at Rome, during the licentious tumult of the festival of Cybele. To murder Commodus, and to ascend the vacant throne, was the ambition of no vulgar robber. His measures were so ably concerted that his concealed troops already filled the streets of Rome. The envy of an accomplice discovered and ruined this singular enterprise, in the moment when it was ripe for execution."

GIBB. *Rome. Chapter III.*

The following is from *Crevier*:

"Maternus, a common soldier and deserter, but of a determined disposition to undertake anything, assembled at first some deserters like himself, with whom he carried on in Gaul the trade of a robber; their success brought them new associates; his gang increased gradually, and became at last an army. There was a necessity of making a regular war against them, and Niger, who afterwards disputed the empire with Severus, was employed to encounter so despicable an enemy, and he acquitted himself like a brave and able officer. Meantime Maternus, in spite of the losses he had suffered, augmented his forces so far as to form a design of killing Commodus, and to make himself emperor in his room.

"He perceived that he could not succeed in such a design, if he showed himself openly, and as his art was equal to his courage, he formed an admirable plan; he divided his troops and ordered them to go into Italy and to Rome, in small parties, and went there himself; his scheme was to avail himself of the Cybeline festival, which was celebrating at Rome with great pomp, and during which every one had the liberty of being disguised; he therefore resolved to take for himself and his followers the dress and armor of the emperor's guards, to mix with them in a kind of a solemn procession where Commodus was present, to come near his person and to murder him.

"The project contained nothing but what was very practicable; but some of those who first entered into it conceived a jealousy of their leader. They had hitherto considered themselves almost his equals, and could not think of making him their master; they discovered the plot. Maternus was seized, with a great number of his accomplices, and they were all punished with death."

CREVIER'S *Hist. Rom. Emp.* Book xxi.

(2) Page 9.

\* \* \* \* \* *The Nones of April is Cybele's day. The Hilaria of Cybele*, better known as the *Megalesia*, began on the *Nones of April*; that is to say, on the *fifth day* of that month.

There is reason to believe that the modern *Carnival* had its origin in the celebration of the rites accorded to Cybele; who was the personification of the Earth, or in mythological style, its Goddess.

DWIGHT'S *Class. Dic.*

(3) Page 12.

*Arms Praetorian.* The imperial body guard was habitually detailed from the Praetorian cohorts encamped near the city. Their equipments were superlatively splendid.

CREVIER. &c.

## ACT II.

(4) Page 14.

POMPEIANUS—a noble Roman Senator, who, with Pertinax, had been an especial friend to Aurelius, the father of Commodus.

ANTISTHEUS BURRHUS and ARRIUS ANTONINUS—Senators and relations of Commodus—the former a brother-in-law. They were men of excellent character. Both of them fell victims to Cleander.

*Ibid.*

(5) Page 14.

COMMODUS—It is difficult to believe this man sane. The incidents following are collated from John Mill's translation of Crevier's *History of the Roman Emperors*. If we can suppose the question of Commodus' sanity referred to a jury, and such circumstances submitted to them as evidence, with all the light of modern intelligence upon the subject, there would not be much room for disagreement. Thus—

He immersed himself in most shocking debaucheries. His seraglio contained six hundred prostitutes of *both sexes*. His sister did not escape his unnatural passion.

His appetite for blood showed itself early. He had a pleasure in killing victims with his own hands. He dressed himself for the purpose like an executioner. He fought with gladiators. In such combats he used a sword sharpened, while they had nothing but foils, with leaden points.

During the administration of Perennis, his first favorite, he shut himself up in his palace, dividing his time between debauchery and combats with gladiators and beasts. He killed four sea-horses at once, two elephants in two days, a rhinoceros and a giraffe: and by such exploits fancied himself the rival of Herenies and Caesar.

Actors of farces and obscene pantomimes governed him; while his hatred of the virtuous friends of his own father carried him to the point of murder several times repeated.

He buried the children of Avidius Cassius alive.

In his murders, when he wanted to prevent too great noise, he employed poisons.

He condemned to the beasts those who were witty about him. To this punishment he sent a party for reading Suetonius' *Life of Caligula*.

If he knew any one who declared he was weary of life, he took him at his word, and threw him down a precipice.

He diverted himself cutting off with a razor the noses and ears of his household, whom he obliged to sit down, as if he intended to shave them.

He affected the surgeon, and, pretending to let blood, slashed the arms, and bled his victims to death.

He affected to be a rival of Hercules, and, like that hero, he fought with giants and monsters. For this he assembled all those in Rome who had lost the use of their legs and caused them to be wrapt up with cloths and linens below the knees, and of such length as to make them resemble the tails of dragons. He gave them sponges, instead of stones, for arms; then rushing upon them, he killed them all with a club.

He had a passion for making a show of himself; driving chariots, as well as fighting gladiators and beasts.

He passed time in gladiator schools; went with them; appeared with them in the arena; fought and required the applause of the people and Senate. The gravest Senators had no choice but to applaud. He exacted his salary as a gladiator, charging a higher price.

Every time he did anything mean or cruel, or acted as a gladiator or master of a debauch, he had it registered in the journals of the city.

He fought three hundred and sixty-five times while his father was alive, and seven hundred and thirty-five times afterwards; and so he gained one thousand victories—such as they were.

Nero raised a colossus for himself, which Vespasian afterwards consecrated to the Sun. This Commodus appropriated, by taking off its head, and putting his own in its place. On the base he ordered the inscription—*Conqueror of a Thousand Gladiators*.

He devoted himself to Isis, and celebrated rites with the priests. Like them, he shaved his head. He helped carry the image of *Anubis*. In the ceremony he struck the litter which supported the statue, so that the mouth and teeth of the god-dog knocked the ministers on their shaven heads.

He taxed the wives and children of Roman Senators two pieces of gold per head.

Once, wanting money, he feigned to go to Africa; obtained large sums for the purpose, and spent them in a debauch; pretending the people of Rome could not spare him.

He frequently appeared as Hercules, covered with a lion's skin, and with a club in his hand. Sometimes he had these marks of divinity carried before him. When not at the games, he had them placed upon the throne appointed for him.

Before the door of the Senate he set up a statue in a threatening attitude, holding a bow bent, and pointed at the Senate.

He frequently showed himself in the dress of a woman.

He was the most consummate archer of his day,—and withal the most beautiful man.

(6) Page 17.

Under Commodus, Rome was dreadfully ravaged by famine, plague, and violent fires.

The famine did not result from barrenness of earth, but the wickedness of men.

The plague was most violent in the city. The daily mortality averaged two thousand cases. Even beasts suffered from the contagion.

CREVIER. *Hist. &c.*

(7) Page 18.

CLEANDER—a Phrygian by birth. He was sold as a slave in his own country, and brought to Rome to do the meanest offices.

In the palace he became the emperor's slave, and was agreeable to Commodus when a child, by a likeness in their dispositions: this beginning he cherished. After his father's death, Commodus gave him his freedom, and appointed him first chamberlain. He also gave him for wife his concubine, *Demostratia*.

Cleander was of mean soul, and abused his power. He put everything to sale, places of Senators, command of armies, government of provinces and intendencies; for all of which he was well paid. Merit and birth were of no account with him. To increase his gains he multiplied offices, and named twenty-five consuls in one year. He had no regard for laws or precedents. Money bought absolution for crimes, and release from judgments, sometimes with additional dignities. No citizen was secure of life or fortune, if he had a rich enemy. Condemnation to banishment, death, punishment of all kinds, confiscations, deprivation of burial, were subjects of barter, and nothing thought of but the price.

By his cruel and abominable traffic, Cleander amassed immense wealth; and to secure his gains he shared them with the emperor's concubines, and even the emperor's self.

He was magnificent in the use of his riches. He built hot baths in Rome, which he called *Commodian Baths*

CREVIER. *Hist. &c.*

(8) Page 22.

MARcia—a concubine who, after having been kept by Quadratus, a Senator, passed into the imperial palace, and maintained herself in favor to the death of Commodus, in which she ultimately had a hand.

CREVIER. *Hist. &c.*

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### ACT III.

(9) Page 29.

*The ragout of Verus*—L. Ceronius Commodus—called Verus. He was the son by adoption of Titus Antoninus, the successor of Adrian, but died before coming to the throne.

This man's habits give a fine idea of the effeminacy of the times. Thus, he was dressed with lilies; his body was perfumed with aromatics;

his table and table seats were covered with lilies and roses; he dressed his young slaves like cupids; he put wings to his couriers, and named them after the winds.

CREVIER. *Hist. &c.*

(10) Page 30.

The salaam referred to is that of one distant from the person saluted—really but a half salaam. The individual, sitting or standing erect, bends forward until his body is parallel with the ground; then he lifts his arms until his hands meet, fingers extended, palms down, in front of his head. The full salaam or prostration is thus typified.

(11) Page 30.

When a gladiator was wounded, the people in their seats called out *Habet* or *Hoc habet*—He has it! The vanquished lowered his arms in token of submission. His fate, however, depended upon the spectators, who pressed *down* their thumbs if they wished him saved, but *up* if they wished him killed.

SMITH. *Dic. of Greek and Rom. Antiq.*

(12) Page 31.

*Now the Corybantes.* The Corybantes were priests of Cybele, called also *Galli*. In the celebration of their festivals, they beat their cymbals and behaved as if delirious.

LEMPRIERE'S *Class. Dic.*

The celebration of Cybele was exceedingly tumultuous, particularly on the part of the priests called *Corybantes* or *Galli*, and of the chief one, *Archigallus*. They went abroad with clamorous music and singing, acting like madmen, and filling the air with mingled noise of shrieks, howlings, drums, tabrets, bucklers and spears.

ESCHENBERG *Man. Class. Lit.*

(13) Page 34.

In the social banquets, held at evening, it was customary among Romans to choose a *Master of the Feast*. He seems to have been chosen by a throw of dice. (*Hor. Od. II. 7. 25.*) To his direction everything connected with the banquet was submitted; particularly all that related to drinking, and the social intercourse of the occasion.

It was also customary to drink healths; the memory of the gods and heroes being usually honored in the first place.

Not only after the meal, but also during it, between the different courses and dishes, social games or plays were practiced.

ESCH. *Man. Class. Lit.*

## ACT IV.

(14) Page 37.

Upon the breaking out of the plague in Rome, Commodus retired to Laurentum, an agreeable country seat, perfumed with laurel groves.

CREVIER *Hist. Rom. Emp.*

(15) Page 38.

CRISPINA—Wife of Commodus. Being taken in adultery, she was transported to the island of Capri, and put to death by order of Commodus.

CREVIER. *Ibid.*

(16) Page 40.

Commodus seems to have really believed himself a god. In course of the delusion he sometimes joined the qualities of Mercury to those of Hercules; imitating the *Hermecrates* commonly placed in the palestrae.

CREVIER. *Ibid.*

The *Hermecrates* (or *Hermeraclæ*) were statues with the head of Hercules upon a square base, the base representing Mercury.

ANTHON. *Dic. Greek and Rom. Antiq.*

## ACT V.

(17) Page 42.

A famine was the cause of the insurrection which resulted in Cleander's fall.

CREVIER. *Hist. Rom. Emp.*

To the same point Gibbon says—

\* \* \* \* \* Pestilence and famine contributed to fill up the measure of the calamities of Rome. The first could only be imputed to the just indignation of the gods; but a monopoly of corn supported by the riches and power of the minister (*Cleander*) was considered as the immediate cause of the second. The popular discontent, after it had long circulated in whispers, broke out in the assembled circus. The people quitted their favorite amusements for the more delicious pleasure of revenge, rushed in crowds toward a palace in the suburbs, one of the imperial retirements, and demanded, with clamors, the head of the public enemy. \* \* \* \* The tumult became a regular engagement, and threatened a general massacre. The Praetorians at length

gave way, oppressed with unnumbers; and the tide of popular fury returned with re-doubled violence against the gates of the palace where Commodus lay, dissolved in luxury, and alone unconscious of the civil war.

GIBBON. *Chapt. IV.*

(18) Page 43.

\* \* \* \* \* He (*Commodus*) would have perished in this supine security, had not two women, his eldest sister (*Fadilla*) and *Marcia*, the most favored of his concubines, ventured to break into his presence. Bathed in tears, and with dishevelled hair, they threw themselves at his feet; and with all the passing eloquence of fear, discovered to the affrighted emperor the crimes of the minister, the rage of the people, and the impending ruin, which, in a few minutes would have burst over his palace and person. Commodus started from his dream of pleasure and commanded that the head of Cleander should be thrown out to the people. The desired spectacle instantly appeased the tumult.

GIBBON. *Chapt. IV.*

(19) Page 45.

*Praefect of the Praetorians*—literally *General of the Praetorian Legions*. Cleander degraded the office to pave the way to it himself. He made and unmade such Praefects at his pleasure; he had one for five days, and another for six hours. At last he obtained the place himself.

CREVIER. *Hist. Rom. Emp.*

(26) Page 47.

The Christians are said to have enjoyed great peace under Commodus, credit for which has been given to Marcia.

CREVIER. *Ibid.*